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Security Unheralded

Any public official who can serve as the director of a government agency for five years — and keep his mouth shut, is deserving of a meritorious award. But Richard Helms, head of the Central Intelligence Agency deserves an award not only for minding his own business — our international security — but for doing it in the face of mountainous vilification from all about him.

Last week he talked to a convention of newspaper editors in Washington, D. C., his first public speech since 1966 when he became head of CIA. He made some very potent points. His address drew little notice, nor many headlines. But what he said has meaning for the frightened folk who insist that their conversations are bugged, their telephones tapped, their privacy invaded. In fact, the CIA "does not target on American citizens," Helms asserted.

Helms said the CIA is not an "invisible government." It is not "involved in world drug traffic."

International espionage is a fact of international life. It must be so long as there are enemies. For instance, Helms said that it would

be "unthinkable" to conclude a strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union "without the means for monitoring compliance."

The United States "must have the means of detecting new developments which might convert one of the regular Soviet air defense missile systems into an ABM network," Helms said.

"We make no foreign policy," he said. "The nation must to a degree take it on faith that we too are honorable men devoted to her service. I can assure you that we are but I am precluded from demonstrating it to the public," he added.

"We not only have no stake in policy debates" within the administration "but we cannot and must not take sides. The role of intelligence in policy formulation is limited to providing facts — the agreed facts — and the whole known range of facts — relevant to the problem under consideration."

The faint hearts, the guilt-torn cannot see the world as it is. And as it is, national survival depends on accurate intelligence information.